



Daniel Sturgis
Don't Argue
Acrylic on canvas
36 x 72 ins / 91.4 x 182.8 cms

I'm rarely comfortable travelling. I usually feel lost and a little bewildered. Despite the determined aspect of a route, the mechanics of a journey are often confusing, claustrophobic and humiliating. The jostling queues, the feeling of mild panic at the possibility of missing the bus, plane or train are only slightly moderated by the relief of anonymity that is afforded. It's so much easier to stay at home. Going there is fraught. Being there will be a pleasure: a new place, full of wonder, different people in exotic clothes, strange and lovely things to see.

I like the comfort of order. The arrangement of things in relation to relative importance, brightness of colour, size or scale and so on, leads to a peaceful state of affairs where there is no misbehaviour, no clutter or confusion and everything functions properly. Things should not be too symmetrical though. Pairs of things are reassuring – two hands, two eyes, two people, knife and fork, cup and saucer, inside and out, up and down, before and after, day and night, sky and earth – even if there is a hierarchy such as big and small, better and worse, here and there.

Daniel invited me round to look at his newly completed painting so that I might write about it. I asked him why he wanted me to write about this particular painting. He is immaculately polite and generous and I got something that sounded like an answer, an indication that this particular work felt somehow pivotal or that it might be the end of a line of enquiry and possibly a beginning of something else. I don't look at paintings enough. It's awkward having to stand there with other people milling about and worrying about how long to spend with it whilst holding the knowledge that mostly people only glance at paintings (which is to be expected of course, because we are all so used to flat, moving images now). I have an idea that Daniel Sturgis's paintings have the appearance of high-end design, Modern abstract art and super-sophisticated fashion fabric – but most of all that they look like 'pictures'.

I've been carrying around a reproduction of the painting *Don't Argue* for a little while now. Stuck between stations on a stuffy tube train the other day, I got it out of my bag to stare at. Having seen the painting in the studio, the image of it was inadequate, more cartoon-like than I remembered. A woman sitting next to me was staring at the picture so, breaking the rules of decorum when travelling in London, I asked her what she thought of the image. She smiled knowingly and with only a few seconds thought described it in an entirely figurative way. She mentioned the 'cherry cakes that look a bit rude, the tablecloth or is it curtains' and the 'funny little people climbing around'. I told her that it was a painting and that I thought it may be abstract and this seemed to upset her a little and she said she really didn't know then. I persisted and asked her what she would think of clouds or houses or sausages if they didn't have names. I asked what they would be. She didn't answer, the train jolted forward and she got off at the next stop. It was probably a stupid question, but I didn't think I could ask her what she thought of guilty Modernist dilemma's – such as the denigration of the domestic, or the impulse to anthropomorphise paintings that appear to make a claim for being 'abstract'. I do think this impulse is a reasonable one though and to consider a painting in terms of what it looks like. (There are other options of course, but I'm not a philosopher or a theorist or a scientist or an historian).

The painting does resemble a type of abstract painting; it does look a bit like an animation still; it certainly looks like a painting by the artist – all elegance and balance, sharp edged with no outlines and muted colours. It's a matter of degree. When one spends any time with the painting (and I have had this privilege), a whole world of associations opens up. The orangey, round cornered rectangle: TV screen, window, road sign, tabletop, or something bigger – building, oil rig platform, Texan field. The green and brown shapes at the top and bottom left: stalactites and stalagmites, cacti, cocks or fingers. The little spheres of colour that seem to circle around other larger forms encourage endless mimetic possibilities, but inevitably they stubbornly maintain an identity as figures, people. It has been suggested by various learned individuals that when very young children first draw a circle with lines emanating around it, they are not drawing the sun – as they will later when they are older and have grasped the idea of copying – they are making an image of themselves, a body with an often imprecise number of arms and legs.

Sturgis' painting samples and references Modernist art, Modern design, computer graphics and many other aspects of common contemporary culture. There is clear agreement about this and as the artist concurs, they share a common ground. Everything on the canvas is rendered in a kind of democratic way. Flat, unmodulated shapes and areas of colour have been laid onto the surface with little evidence of their making apart from some mapping out lines in graphite here and there to reinforce the fact that the painting is hand-made. There are parts of the painting that seem to act as background pattern, holding a foreground of suspended action. Then again, there is an idea of looking down on something or that it can be read as a series of screens, either overlapping or butting up against each other. Maybe the thing is to think of it as a kind of dream screen, where all kinds of things can occur. Most of all the painting looks like a painting by Daniel Sturgis. It is ambrosial, uplifting, funny, awkward, familiar and peculiar.

Roy Voss

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It's good to be home.
(You don't have to argue anywhere)
You can't argue anywhere.
(You don't have to argue anywhere)
It's good to be home.

Daniel Sturgis *Don't Argue*